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ABSTRACT

The divergence controversy is addressed in this holistic examination of Vernacular Black English (VBE). The debate over VBE stems from Labov's conclusion that the vernaculars of Black and White dialects in the South reveal completely different patterns of development. This study is based on patterns obtained from the writer's earlier research on older VBE speakers from the rural South and supplemented with patterns based on personal experience as an African American raised in the South. Approximately 50 VBE patterns are identified that attest to the radical difference between VBE and other nonstandard dialects, but it is concluded that divergence is a question that cannot be answered by this study alone. The findings are consistent with current theories about VBE tense-aspect, particularly those involving invariant "be." Contains 6 references. (LB)

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The Tense-Aspect System of Vernacular Black English (VBE): Divergent or Different?

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Running head: TENSE-ASPECT

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Abstract

This study addresses the divergence controversy. A holistic examination of Vernacular Black English (VBE), it is based on patterns obtained from my earlier studies of older VBE speakers from the rural South, and supplemented, where necessary, with patterns based on my own experience as a African American reared in the South.

The approximately fifty VBE patterns discerned attest to the radical difference between VBE and other nonstandard dialects; however, divergence is a question that cannot be answered by this study alone.

The findings are consistent with current theories about VBE tense-aspect, particularly those involving invariant be.

Tense-Aspect System of Vernacular Black English (VBE): Divergent or Different?

Much of the current debate concerning Vernacular Black English (VBE) stems from comments made by noted linguist William Labov (1985). According to Labov, the vernaculars of black and white dialects, particularly those in the South, are revealing completely different patterns of development. Since that fateful announcement, linguists have spent countless hours trying to prove the validity, or lack thereof, of what has come to be known as the divergence controversy.

Those who oppose this divergence theory cite a number of counterexamples. Vaughn-Cooke (1987 [in Bailey & Maynor 1989]), for example, expresses the opposite viewpoint--that, in actuality, the vernaculars are converging. Vaughn-Cooke substantiates this theory with evidence from phonology, such as the unstressed initial syllables of some bi- and multi-syllabic words.

Bailey and Maynor themselves, while acknowledging that divergence is more widespread, do, however, admit to having found evidence of convergence as well. They cite the pin-pen minimal pair as an example as their prime example. However, they cite even more evidence of divergence, such as the difference in the treatment of postvocalic r; the placement of back vowels, and,

for their primary syntactic evidence, the difference between the frequency and use of be + V-ing by older and younger VBE speakers. In fact, to discourage this all-or-nothing approach assumed by some linguists, Bailey and Maynor (1989) have expressed, "To suggest that [VBE] and white vernaculars are diverging...is not to suggest that they are diverging with respect to every feature and subsystem" (p. 19).

Like Bailey and Maynor, Labov feels that not all aspects of language reflect this divergence. His greatest evidence, in fact, lies not in the phonology, but, rather, in the syntax. In his studies, Labov illustrates this divergence mainly by noting the frequency with, and the contexts in, which be occurs. Conducting these studies over variable time spans, age groups, and population types, Labov concludes that the patterns which evolve from the be + V-ing and {Ø} show divergence across age groups. He then summarizes his findings as follows:

> Those rules are now aligned in many ways with the rules of other dialects but still show evidence of derivation from an earlier creole and, especially in the aspectual system, show a continuing development in semantic structure." (Labov 1982 [In Bailey & Maynor 1989])

In support of these claims, Labov and a number of other linguists cite the following tense-aspect

features of VBE that differ radically not only from patterns in other nonstandard dialects, but, in some cases, from earlier versions of VBE as well:

1) the finite use of invariant _be_, or _be_$_2$ (Butters 1989 [in Wolfram 1990]; Labov 1982), particularly with the progressive (Bailey & Maynor 1987), Myhill 1988;
2) narrative _-s_ (with its non-occurrence on _say_ and the second verb in conjoined patterns) (Wolfram 1990);
3) the 'resultative' pattern _be done_ (Labov 1985 [in Wolfram 1990]);
4) the use of patterns of disapproval, such as _come_ + _V-ing_ _go_ + _V_, and _done_ + _V-ed/-en_ (Spears 1982 [in Myhill 1988]); and the distinction between the anterior past auxiliary _had_ and the completive or perfective auxiliary _done_. (Myhill 1988);
5) subject-verb concord;
6 Remote and recent past markers (_been_ + _bin_).

From my own observations, however, I have determined that many of these isolated findings are relatively consistent with the broader rule system of VBE tense-aspect. Moreover, until this larger picture becomes clear, the piecemeal approach to VBE, particularly to its tense-aspect system, will continue to elude us. Therefore, I have used patterns from my earlier studies of older African Americans from the rural South, as well as those based on my own experience, in order to describe these general rules by which VBE speakers make their tense-aspect choices.

Tense-Aspect Patterns of VBE

Like Standard American English (SAE), VBE recognizes all three time periods--the past, the present, and the future. In SAE, however, these time frames are symbolized by -s (3rd person singular present), -ed (the past), and will + V (future). Moreover, there are two grammatical aspects--the progressive, or imperfective, (-ing) and the perfective (-en). The reporting of occurrences, however, is further enhanced by the inclusion of several anterior operators, used to mark occurrences that precede events in the present (have/has); past (had); and future (will have). Other modifications result from the addition of modals, from the inclusion of adverbs of time, frequency, and manner, and from verb semantics--that is, the innate verb quality, which determines whether is inherently stative (as with is), active (as with do); whether it is transitive (as with kick) or intransitive (as with walk) and so forth.

In VBE, on the other hand, tense is, for the most, such an intricate part of the aspect system that often an overt tense marker is optional in the presence of aspectual operators that occur only in a particular tense. For example, when VBE speakers use no verb whatsoever, the immediate present can be inferred.

Moreover, when been or bin is used, a past event is being reported.

In addition to some of the aspects assuming a secondary function of indicating tense, the numerous aspects used by VBE speakers serve primarily to describe the nature of an occurrence, especially in terms of its beginning and end points, as well as its durational patterns. To adequately capture their highly discriminating perceptions, VBE speakers employ a highly refined aspectual system, which is further enhanced by the anteriority operator.

In order to better illustrate this tense-aspect union in VBE, I have employed some of the nomenclature identified by Nida (1949/1976). These, along with their realization in VBE, are as follows: the habituative (be); the continuative (stay + -en/-s); the imperfective (or progressive in SAE [V-ing]); the augmentative (or regulative [steady/regular/a + V-ing]); the inchoative (go/get to + V-ing). It is my contention that these aspects, in addition to the anteriority morpheme {have}, can be combined to express nuances of meaning which, if addressed at all by SAE speakers, are done so, primarily, through circumlocution. The remainder of this discussion, then, will center around the ways in which the

aspectual operators function, both singly and combined, to realize those present, past, and anticipated future occurrences that reflect VBE speakers' perceptions of reality.

The Realizations of Present Occurrences

As I stated earlier in this discussion, the present tense is symbolized in VBE by {Ø}. For example, when VBE speakers want to indicate a present state, they may well utter, "That boy sick" or "I'm in my room." Thus, the absence of a time operator imposes both immediacy (The information asserted in the argument is assumed to be occurring or existing at the moment it is being expressed, or at the speech time); and stativeness (The focus is on the condition being described; there is no concern, or, usually, perception of, the beginning and ending points of the condition).

The imperfective, or progressive aspect, symbolized by -ing, is also used to indicate a present time occurrence; however, its effect on the verb to which it is attached is determined by the semantics of the verb. For example, when attached to a verb which has inherent action, as does an activity, achievement, or accomplishment verb, then the only effect of this progressive aspect is immediacy. On the other hand,

when attached to a stative verb, the progressive imposes both immediacy and activity or movement. Consider the following:

7) My sister talking on the telephone.
8) Look at her; she loving it.
9) The football team playing pretty good.

In (7), the suffixation of the progressive on a verb which already has inherent activity allows only for immediacy, whereas, in (8), the addition of the imperfective/progressive adds both immediacy and activity to a typically stative verb. Since the verb in (9) has inherent activity, only immediacy is added; however, if a time adverbial is added, as in "The football team playing pretty good this season," then that effect, too, is negated.

A third present time indicator in VBE is the habitual, which is usually symbolized by either be or the uninflected verb stem. Not only can these morphemes broaden the scope of the occurrence so that occurrence is instantiated over a wider present time span, but it can also describe the occurrence episodically over this wider span. The resulting portioning of the occurrence over longer stretches of time gives the feeling of regularity, frequency, repetition, or habituality. Consider the following examples, which contain the be habitual:

10) My dog be barking at strangers.
11) I be knowing he lying but I just don't say nothing.
12) That boy be scared to ask the teacher questions.

Example (10) indicates that the action of the verb occurs frequently enough for the speaker to make an assertion about it. The act, however, is not in progress at the moment the speaker is asserting it. The same is true of (11). As is the case with (10), in (11), the speaker is asserting the truth of a state of mind which occurs frequently, yet which is not in present at the time of the assertion. In (12), the fearful state has occurred often enough for the speaker to assume it to be a probable future occurrence, based on more than one observation of the asserted state.

Be, however, is not the only means VBE speakers have for imposing this kind of episodic flavor on the verb; they also have at their disposal the uninflected present tense verb. Thus, what appears to be the VBE speakers' lack of knowledge of the rules of subject-verb concord is, in actually, the application of a different set of rules. If, for example, VBE speakers utter, "You make me sick," the intent is "You often (or sometimes) annoy me." When they say, "He go this way to school," again, the intent is to show a regular or consistent pattern of behavior.

When, on the other hand, VBE speakers want to focus not on the overall behavior itself, but, rather on the commencement of the behavior, they use the fixed uninflected forms go or get, followed by the inceptive pattern to + V-ing. Representing the inchoative, or inceptive aspect, this pattern is reflected in such common VBE expressions as "He go to-feeling kinda bad" or "He get-to acting real silly." In both of the preceding statements, importance is given only to the initiation of the habitual state ("feeling kinda bad") or action ("acting real silly").

Thus, VBE speakers find acceptable such statements as, "Everytime I go to church with my aunt, she get to-clapping and shouting and stompin' her feet" or "Whenever my friend Gail see a cute guy, she go to-talking proper like she from New York or somewhere."

If the occurrence is so regular, or repetitious, that it appears to be a permanent characteristic of the individual who initiates or undergoes it, then the VBE speaker might well resort to still another present tense aspect, called the continuative. The continuative, as encoded in VBE, assumes two main forms: -s and stay + -en. These aspectual markers stativize present actions, thus imposing the added semantic quality of boundlessness to the meaning of the

verb. For example, in a statement such as "They lies," the added dimension to the verb stem imposes a stative, or never-ending condition equivalent to "They are big liars." Likewise, "We takes good care of our chillun" can be commuted with "We are good caretakers or parents"; "I sings real good" with "I am a good singer"; and "You supplies my every need" with "You are a good supplier"

Not even the ultimate habitual is immune from this stativization process. Thus, it is not uncommon in VBE to hear such expressions as "It be(s) that way sometime." With or without the time adverbial, the expression indicates a recurrent state. As in Standard American English (SAE), time adverb is used to indicate how regular the occurrence is. Moreover, the usual discourse function of this expression is to console someone (even oneself) who is in a pitiable state.

The second continuative, stay + -en, also imposes a type of permanence on the verb; however, given that it can only be used with already stative verbs or predicates, then, its primary discourse function is to emphatically condemn that state. Thus, the word is usually stressed, as with "Your brother STAY gone" or "Our teacher STAY sick." The intent of the former might be, for example, "He needs to stay at home

sometimes" or "He is never at home when he should be." For the latter, the real intent would probably be, "How can she do a good job if she's never here?"

Still another aspect employed by VBE speakers to express present time occurrences is the augmentative (or regulative). The augmentative, or regulative, aspect directs attention to the rate of speed at which an activity occurs. This aspect is symbolized by two patterns, both of which must precede an -ing verb. Though these usually occur in the past tense, they can also assume a present time meaning. These patterns are a + V-ing and steady/regular + V-ing. Consider the following:

13) Look at that girl over there; she steady/regular talking.
14) Look at that girl over there; she just a-talking.

In (13), the insertion of steady/regular imposes the act of gauging or monitoring the loquacious subject. In (14), the same thing occurs. This aspect can also be combined with the habitual, resulting in "That girl over there be steady working."

Finally, VBE speakers can indicate present time simultaneous occurrences. Resulting in serialization, this pattern of simultaneity (come/go + V-ing) is reflected in such statements as, "He come telling me not that I didn't have enough money" or "Those little

kids go running to tell everything that goes on." In both of the preceding patterns, the primary semantic information is contained in the second verb, or the imperfective (progressive). What then is the function of the first verb? Previous studies have shown, at least in the case of come + V-ing, that the function is to express disapproval (Spears 1982 [in Myhill 1988]), mild indignation, or contempt for the subject of the pattern. It is my contention, moreover, that this negativity is sometimes the case with go + V-ing as well, a conclusion which was also alluded to by Spears, in reference to the pattern go + V. However, unlike the come pattern, the go pattern can be used to merely express a positive experience, as in "I go fishing about once a month."

A Summary of Present Realizations in VBE

To indicate the nature of events or states that occur in the present, then, VBE speakers can express: 1) an immediate present state ("She sick"); 2) a habitual state or habitual initiation ("She be sick" or "She get sick); 3) an emphatic or habitual state ("She STAY sick" or "She be[s] sick); 4) the inception of a habitual state ("She go to-getting sick"); 5) their negative reaction to the onset of a state ("She come getting sick" or "She go getting sick"); 6) a habitual

inceptive action ("She be getting sick"); 7) the results of their gauging the potency or speed of an action ("She steady getting sicker); 8) The action itself ("She getting sick"); 9) and the habitual augmentative ("She be steady getting sick (er)").

The Realizations of Past Occurrences

A number of the aspects used in the present tense by VBE speakers can also be employed to capture the reality of past tense events as well. These versatile aspects include habitual be, the imperfective, or progressive (-ing), the inchoative (go/get + V-ing), the emphatic continuative stay, the augmentative, or regulative patterns (a + V-ing; steady/regular + V-ing) and the simulfactive (come/go + V-ing). To indicate past time, however, some of these patterns obligatorily co-occur with past time operators, while others, such as the inchoative come and the habitual be have a fixed form; thus, unlike the present tense, which can use most of these patterns alone, the past tense patterns obligatorily combine in all cases, except when the simple, indefinite, unspecified past is intended.

In VBE, these exclusively past time operators are as follows: the past tense morphemes (-ed/-en), the completive (or perfective) aspect marker (done), the

recent past marker (been), the distant past marker (bin), and the anterior operator (have) for occurrences initiated, and sometimes, terminated before the future time); had for an occurrence that precedes another past time occurrence).

Given the number of possibilities for expressing the nature of past events, the VBE speakers tense-aspect choices are then based on the highly differentiated past frames in which the occurrence lies. These frames are as follows: simple past, the recent past, and the distant, or remote, past.

The Simple Past. When the primary goal of VBE speakers is, simply, to relate or report that an event occurred at some point in the past, then they use the VBE simple past tense markers, -ed or -en. Note that whereas in SAE, the former pattern represents tense only and the latter aspect only, in VBE either can indicate the past tense. For example, both "I saw" and "I seen" are acceptable in VBE, for both are, obviously, past time occurrences. Thus, this phase represents occurrences whose exact placement in time is indefinite, and is, therefore, not specified by the verb itself; however, as in SAE, exact time specifications can be included, as in "I seen him last night" or "I saw that show last year."

When VBE speakers want to express simultaneous past events in the simple past, then they resort to an aspect already discussed in relationship to the present tense: the simulfactive aspect, represented by come/go + V-ing. As is the case in the present tense, these patterns, according to Spears, carry overtones of disapproval, or condemnation, as captured in such expressions as, "He come telling me what to do" and "He went running home crying to his mama." Notice that in the preceding examples, come observes no tense change, whereas go assumes its past tense form went--a pattern that might very well be a key to the fixed nature of come on VBE narratives.

As in the present tense, in the simple past tense, VBE speakers can mark the beginning of an occurrence, using the tensed inchoative pattern, go/get to + V-ing. Thus, VBE speakers often produce expressions, such as "We got/went to-laughing and singing and completely forgot about the time." Also, as with the present tense, in the past tense, VBE speakers can show strong negative reactions to a state-like past occurrence, as in "He STAYED gone." Using the {be} + V-ing pattern, VBE speakers can not only can express the simple past imperfect (progressive) pattern used in SAE, but they can further refine this pattern through the addition of

the augmentative/regulative, resulting in such past patterns as "He was just a-playing," "They was steady running," or "My roommate was regular studying." This pattern, thus, is often used to fulfill the discourse function reflecting the listener's incredulity or surprise as to the subject's actions.

Finally, in the simple past, VBE speakers can employ the anterior operator had to show precedence. For example, when combined with the perfective, this pattern allows VBE speakers to express that "After I had knew/knowed/know/known him a little longer, I felt I could trust him a little more." When this anterior operator is combined with the perfective inchoative, then the result may very well be: "Before the teacher could even call their names, the two boys had done got to-fighting." When the anterior operator is combined only with the inchoative, however, the result can be the past participle form of the inchoative, as in "Before the teacher could even call their names, the two boys had gone to-fighting." Also, when combined with the simulfactive, the anterior operator allows statements, such as "The boy had went crying to the teacher."

The Recent Past. The recent past also employs some of the intricacies expressed in the present tense, such as patterns that clearly delineate the end of the past event. However, it is used, primarily, for precedence relationships, particularly those occurrences that immediately precede or transcend the present boundary. For example, to show that an occurrence begins and ends just before speech time, VBE speakers use the recent perfective pattern done + V-en (or -ed), as in "He done gone and broke his arm." In fact, with the completive already indicating past time, VBE speakers often do not inflect the main verb; thus, such common patterns as, "I done eat" and "The man done come home" are deemed acceptable.

Another recent past pattern is the cessative, which is expressed as been, followed by a stative predicate. Examples of this pattern include "I been sick" and "The man been home." Notice, however, that the second of these patterns is potentially ambiguous, as indicated by the following meanings

15a) The man been home =
15b) But he has left again.
15c) The man been home for a long time.

Clearly, then, (15a) can have either meaning (15b) or (15c). When it assumes meaning (15b), then it is a true cessative, with the end point of the occurrence having been reached; however, when it assumes the meaning express in (15c), then, clearly, it is a continuative, or stative. Another example of this cessative intent is "I been bad," which implies that "I am no longer that way."

VBE can also focus on the durational aspect of an action or state, using the pattern been + V-ing/-en. For example, in "I been talking," although the activity of talking begins and ends in the past, the focus is on the duration of the activity before the present moment. To express a past state, on the other hand, VBE speakers use the pattern been, followed by a stative predicate, such as an adjectival ("My mama been sick") or locational one ("My mama been in her room all day").

Finally, in the recent past, VBE speakers can combine patterns to epress even more nuances of meaning. For example, when they want to indicate that the beginning of an action occurred just before the present moment, they employ the perfective inchoative (done got to + V-ing), as in "My little boy don't wanna

leave right now; he done got-to enjoying himself." Also via these recent past patterns, VBE speakers can express past habituals, as with the habituative perfective (be done + V-ed/ -en), as in "This man on my job-he be done did/done all his work 'fo the rest of us even git started." In the preceding statement, the speaker is indicating that on a regular basis (habitual) in the (past) the subject completed (perfective) his job assignment before his or her fellow workers even began their assignments. VBE speakers can also use the habituative perfective inchoative (be done got to-V-ing), as expressed in the statement, "When I hear good singing in church, I just can't control myself; I be done got to-shouting 'fo I even realize what's happening." The preceding statement expresses that on a regular basis (habitual) in the (past), the subject begins (inchoative) the act of shouting, and that onset of this act is completed (perfective) even before the subject realizes it.

The Distant Past. Many of the patterns which VBE speakers express in the recent past can also be expressed in the distant past; however, the important difference is the type of operator used. Whereas in the recent past, the primary operators were the grammatical tense morphemes -ed and -en, the completive

done, and the stativizer been, in the distant past, the primary operator is the distant stative bin (also called accented been). Along with the anterior past operator had, this distant operator allows VBE speakers to address events that occur long before the present.

The key operator, the distant past indicator bin, can combine with a number of aspect markers to express the variable nature of remote events. For example, it can combine with the simple past operators to show that an event or state occurred a long time ago, as in the following:

16) I BIN took my exams
17) He BIN gone.
18) That man BIN walked by me.

In (16), the process of completing the exams obviously begins and ends long before the speaker asserts this fact. In (17), too, the act of leaving occurs long before the speaker asserts it; thus, the speaker is referring to the duration of time between the point of departure and the moment of speaking. In (18), too, which employs a regular verb, the activity of passing by was completed in the distant past.

Bin is also used to relate a number of other distant past events. For example, it can combine with -ing to indicate that an activity that began a long

time ago, but which, given the nature of the imperfective, is still going on, as in "I BIN singing." Furthermore, bin can precede the inchoative got/went to + V-ing, to produce such colorful statements as the following:

19) I BIN got to-shouting.
?20) My baby BIN went to-walking.

In (19), the inception of the act is actually what began a long time ago; however, the act of shouting itself, being in the imperfective, is what is still going on. Item (20), on the hand, is marginally acceptable in VBE, since the verb went, unlike got, does not indicate the act of capturing something. Although this latter inchoative is acceptable in the simple past, in the distant past, its already weak sense of "inception" is further weakened by the significant temporal distance from the moment of speaking. Consequently, VBE speakers often substitute the SAE "started," which is inherently "inceptive." The result of this juxtaposition of borrowed and original VBE tense-aspect material is exemplified in the following: "My baby BIN started to walking" or "My baby BIN start walking."

It is also possible in VBE to impose the distant past marker on the perfective inchoative imperfective pattern (Bin done got to + V-ing). This pattern

usually result requires a modal as well. The result is such VBE patterns as "If it hadn't been for his fear of God, my brother would've BIN done got to-messing around on his wife." In this statement, the probable ("would have") completion ("done") of the commencement ("got to-messing") of the continual act (messing around) is what occurred a long time before the moment of speaking ("BIN"). A final option VBE speakers when expressing the nature of distant past occurrences is to use the anterior (had). When had is combined with the distant perfective, the resulting pattern is had BIN V-ed/V-en, as in "By the time the cops got there, the drug dealers had BIN gone." Likewise, this anterior distant past pattern can be used with the imperfective (had BIN V-ing), as in "When the talent scouts discovered me, I hadn't JUST started singing; I had BIN singing." This same pattern can also be combined with the inchoative ("I could tell when I got here that they had BIN got-to arguing"). Again, however, when the pattern went to + V-ing is used to reported a distant past occurrence, the result is similar to the following: "They had BIN started to-arguing/start(ed) arguing."

A Summary of Past Realizations in VBE

VBE speakers have in their frame of references three time frames: the simple (indefinite) past, the

recent past (or anterior present) and the distant or remote past (also the anterior past). With the past tense and aspectual operators, VBE speakers have the means to reflect even the minute details of an occurrence.

They can focus on the completion of an occurrence in the three time frames ("I made"/"I done made"/"I BIN made"). Or they can highlight other facets of the activity. For example, in the simple past, they can focus on the onset ("I got/went to-making"); (indicate contempt for a subjects simultaneous actions ("He come/*went making"); emphatically show contempt for a state ("His bed STAYED unmade"); or show precedence relationships ("He had made"/"He had done made"/"He had got to-making"/"He had done got to-making")

In the recent past, on the other hand, VBE speakers can indicate the completion of an anterior present action ("I done made") or state ("I been sick"/"I been in the house"). They can, furthermore, reflect the completion of the onset of an occurrence ("I done got to-making"); or indicate the habitual nature of these occurrence ("I be done made"/"I be done got to-making").

Finally, to accurately reflect the nature of distant past occurrences, VBE speakers can employ a

number of strategies as well. They can focus on the end point of an action ("I BIN made") or the initiation of an activity ("I BIN making"). They can capture the onset of the activity ("I BIN got to-making"); or the point immediately after the onset ("I BIN done got to-making"). Finally, they can indicate precedence relationships, using the anterior operator had ("I had BIN made"/"I had BIN got-to-/gone- making").

The Realizations of the Future

As is the case in Standard American English (SAE), speakers of Vernacular Black English (VBE) can use the future modal and verb stem (will + V) to indicate directly an expected occurrence. Also, as with SAE speakers, VBE speakers can use indirect or periphrastic means to achieve that same goal, as in "I'm going to go to New York" or "I am having company tomorrow." Moreover, like SAE speakers, VBE speakers can express the earlier of two future events; however, whereas SAE speakers might express "By the time you get back, I will have gone to lunch," thus employing the future perfective, VBE speakers use a number of other strategies to indicate this anteriority, based on the nature of the activity which it wishes to capture.

For one thing, VBE speakers can use either the direct or the periphrastic future anterior perfective, as in "By the time you get back, I'll be done gone to lunch" or "By the time you get back, I'm (usually pronounced [um]) gone (Reduction of "going to") be done gone to lunch." VBE can also refer to the initiation of an expected act, as in "When I go over there, they will get to- fussin' and fightin'--right in front of me"; or the initiation of a future act that will precede another, as in "By the time I get to their house, they will be done got to-fussin' and fightin'. In addition, VBE speakers can refer to expected occurrences that will be at great distances from each other. For example, they can employ the future distant anterior perfective (will have BIN + V-ed/en), as in "When my sister graduates from high school, I will have BIN finished college." In the preceding quote, which is equivalent to SAE future perfect, the second event, finishing college, will occur long before the first, graduating from high school. Thus, VBE can indicate not only a recent past of the future, but a distant past as well.

In the same manner, VBE can indicate the distant anterior imperfective (will have BIN + V-ing), as in "When I grow up, I will have BIN knowing the facts of

life" or "By the time you turn eighteen, you will have BIN dating." Likewise, it can refer to the initiation of anterior events, as in "Before you reach your destination, you will have BIN got to thinking about how you treated me."

Finally, the VBE future can express still other aspectual intents mentioned preceding sections of this paper. For example, it can reflect the continuative ("If you don't take good care of him now, when he gets older, he will STAY sick"), as well as the augmentative ("When I get ready to go on my trip tomorrow, I won't any time to waste; I will be steady running"). Moreover, since it allows its speaker to refer to both a distant and recent past of the future, then it can incorporate aspects associated with both of these, such as the recent perfective inchoative ("By the time I get home, my neighbors will be done got-to fighting already") and the distant perfective inchoative ("By the time I get home, my neighbors will have BIN done got-to fighting.")

A Summary of Future Realizations in VBE

As is the case with the simple past, the simple future in VBE is both indefinite and unspecified; however, also like the past, this simple future can be made definite, mainly through the inclusion of time

adverbials. To mark this future, VBE speakers, like those in SAE, can use either direct or indirect means.

Furthermore, not only does VBE allow for the expressing of simple future time occurrences, but also the encoding of anterior future occurrences, using both recent and distant past indicators. Thus, VBE speakers can simply say either "I will make" or "I'm going to make." Moreover, they can refer to future imperfect acts ("I will be making") or states ("It will STAY made"). They can monitor an action ("I will be steady/regular making"), they can predict a simultaneous action ("They will come making"), or capture the moment of onset of an activity ("They will go to-making").

They can, furthermore, predict precedence relationship, as in "We will be done left" (simple anterior future); "We will have come telling lies" (anterior future simulfactive); "We will have STAYED sick" (anterior future continuative); "We will be done got-to" (anterior future inchoative); "We will have been sick" (future anterior); "We will have BIN sick/talking" (distant future stative/imperfective); "We will have BIN got to-know(ing) you" (distant future inchoative), and "We will have BIN done got to-cooking" (distant future perfective inchoative).

Conclusion

Whether the preceding patterns represent divergence or distinction is still an issue to be decided; nevertheless, it is only when the whole of a something is examined, each part in relation to every other, that the true essence of that thing can be captured. And a holistic approach is exactly the intent of this paper.

As I said at the outset, the patterns presented in the preceding discussion are based on data obtained during my earlier studies of older VBE speakers from the rural South. These patterns are supplemented by those from my own repertoire. Nevertheless, I am reasonably sure that they are quite representative of the whole of VBE, despite my having to resort to standard English patterns when the focus was not on the VBE representation.

Most importantly, the patterns outlined above are consistent with the current theories of VBE. It is obvious that from the patterns described above, both the finite _be_ and the increase in the _be_ + _-ing_ patterns described recently by Butters (1989 [in Wolfram 1990]), Myhill (1988), Bailey and Maynor (1987), and Labov (1982) are common occurrences,

especially in light of the number of patterns that include the habitual and progressive patterns.

The preceding analysis also explains the distinction between been/bin in terms of recent and distant past stativizers and that between had and done in terms of anterior past and anterior present operators.

Moreover, this analysis, by examining the whole of Vernacular Black English, offers possible explanations for other heretofore unexplained phenomena, such as the 'resultative be done' examined by Labov (1985 [in Wolfram 1990]). Based on the preceding information, this pattern fits the more general label of a habitual perfective; thus, a habitual action is completed before another action can be instantiated. When the "be" however, represents the reduced phrase "will be done," then the act is not habitual; rather, it is an anticipated act that will precede another anticipated, or future act. In other words, be done refers to the anterior habitual, whereas "will be done" refers to the anterior future.

Likewise, the preceding analysis can be enlightening in terms of questions about the nature of narrative -s (with its non-occurrence on say and the second verb in conjoined patterns) (Wolfram 1990),

especially since the tendency in VBE is to avoid redundancy (aspect alone often indicates tense).

Finally, future investigations of the patterns of disapproval, such as come + V-ing , go + V, and done + V-ed/-en, as identified by Spears 1982 [in Myhill 1988]), should benefit from such analysis, in view of serialization and the nature of the individual aspectual operators associated with these patterns.

I would not expect for the information contained in this paper to supply the answer to every question about the grammatical nature of VBE. To some, it might just be a mere summary of what has already been done in the field; nevertheless, it is an attempt at pulling the various pieces together in order to find patterns, for if any real progress is to be made in understanding the nature of this phenomenon, and in understanding the nature of the divergence or distinction, then a holistic analysis may not be a bad place to start. ###

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